



GRAND FINALE- Bob Dylan at final concert with the Band at the Inglewood Forum Thursday evening.
Times photo by Marianna Diamos

ROBERT HILBURN

Dylan Saves the Best for Last

During the final days of the Bob Dylan tour with the Band, I kidded Louie Kemp, Dylan's friend from Minnesota who accompanied him on the six-week concert swing, about the difficulty of his readjusting—after the glamor and adventure of the tour—to his nonshow business job back home.

But I, too, felt a great loss as I left the Inglewood Forum early Friday morning after what was, according to a sampling of those who had seen all the shows, the best concert of the 21-city tour. It's hard being exposed to the best—and that's what Dylan and the Band are—and then returning to the routine of pop music.

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I think the loss is greater because I saw several of the concerts. If I'd just seen one, I might be tempted to think the excitement of merely seeing Dylan again after all these years was what made it so special. But the repeated looks convince you it is truly the music. That's one of the lessons of this tour: It's the music that matters most. Both Dylan and the Band have superb material, something that glitter, theatrics, massive volume or sheer electronic gimmickry can't replace.

Another lesson is the importance of really *wanting* to perform. All too often concerts are simply another stop on an annual or semiannual tour, a series of shows that are ground out by performers wanting to promote the latest album. Dylan, who was touring for the first time in eight years, and the Band, on the road for the first time in more than two years, waited until they were ready.

Before the tour began, the Band's Robbie Robertson explained why the Band didn't go on tour after the success of its "Rock of Ages" album in 1972: "It seemed like such an inartistic move. To my mind, we had already been to those cities and halls. The idea is not to repeat yourself but to keep moving. You've got to be dying to go on the road or it's stale, meaningless. You've got to really be up for it, which is the case now."

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The desire of Dylan and the Band was still strong when I caught up with them in Seattle last week for the final few dates. "Bob's really into playing," Robertson said. "It's not like he's just rushing through the final shows. He really wants to play."

There were, as one would expect on the final night of the tour, yells of "play all night" and "never leave" Thursday at the Forum, but Dylan and the Band ended their set and tour shortly af-

ter midnight with a spirited and lovely version of "Blowin' in the Wind." They had expanded their regular set by only one song ("Mr. Tambourine Man") for the final show.

As it was Wednesday night, the emotion in the arena built steadily through the evening, reaching the first of several peaks during Dylan's acoustic set. But the frenzy of "Like a Rolling Stone"—with 18,600 persons on their feet screaming the chorus of the song with Dylan—was once again the supreme moment.

For most of the more than 650,000 persons who saw this tour, it will be hard to go back to the original versions of Dylan's songs. They have been so redesigned instrumentally and sung with such firmer, bolder vocals that the upcoming live album will no doubt be the most rewarding way to listen to these Dylan songs.

Before leaving the Forum stage, Dylan—in a sensitive, affectionate gesture that tells a lot about his sometimes hidden personality—called Bill Graham, the man who produced all 40 concerts, and Barry Imhoff, one of Graham's associates, on stage for bows. I've seen a lot of pop music superstars but rarely has any of them been thoughtful enough to share the stage with another.

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The recognition was deserved. Graham has long been called rock's finest concert producer, but his efficiency and style were rarely better demonstrated than on this smoothly run tour. Long before the audience arrived Thursday, Graham was at the Forum going through a variety of last-minute touches. For the children of Dylan and the Band, he set up a playroom that featured a miniature pool table, electric trains, magnetic dart boards, refreshments and a color television set. He also arranged for a huge "Happy Valentine" banner to unfurl from the arena ceiling just as Dylan walked on stage for an encore. It was a surprise that brought a big smile to the musicians' faces. And he rehearsed the stage crew time and time again to make sure the lighting effects during the climactic "Like a Rolling Stone" were just right.

At a reception after the concert, Dylan, looking even more relaxed than the day after his triumphant return in Chicago, was asked if he would miss not having another concert. "Yes," he said with a soft smile, speaking without hesitation. A lot of us feel the same way. My guess—and it is only a guess—is that he'll do another tour. But the timing, as usual, will be at his own chosen speed.